

The Full Bust Adjustment Guide

A five-step pattern fix for sewists above a C cup

What this guide is for. If your full bust measures more than 2 inches larger than your high bust, the standard pattern size will not fit you straight from the envelope. You need a full bust adjustment, also called an FBA. This guide walks you through the simplest version, the slash-and-spread method, in five steps. The whole adjustment takes about 15 to 20 minutes once you have done it once.

Who this is for. Beginners who have finished at least one sewing project. You should know how to use a ruler, a pencil, scissors, and tape. No prior pattern adjustment experience is required.

What you will be able to do after. Adjust any bodice pattern with a side bust dart so the bust apex sits in the right place, the hem hangs level, and the shoulders do not slip off your arms.

What you need before you start

Pattern paper or tracing paper (a roll, or several large sheets) · Pencil and eraser · Clear ruler (18 inch or longer) · Paper scissors · Clear tape · Your bodice or dress pattern, traced (not the original tissue) · Your measurements written down

Time

15 to 20 minutes

Skill level

Confident beginner

When to do it

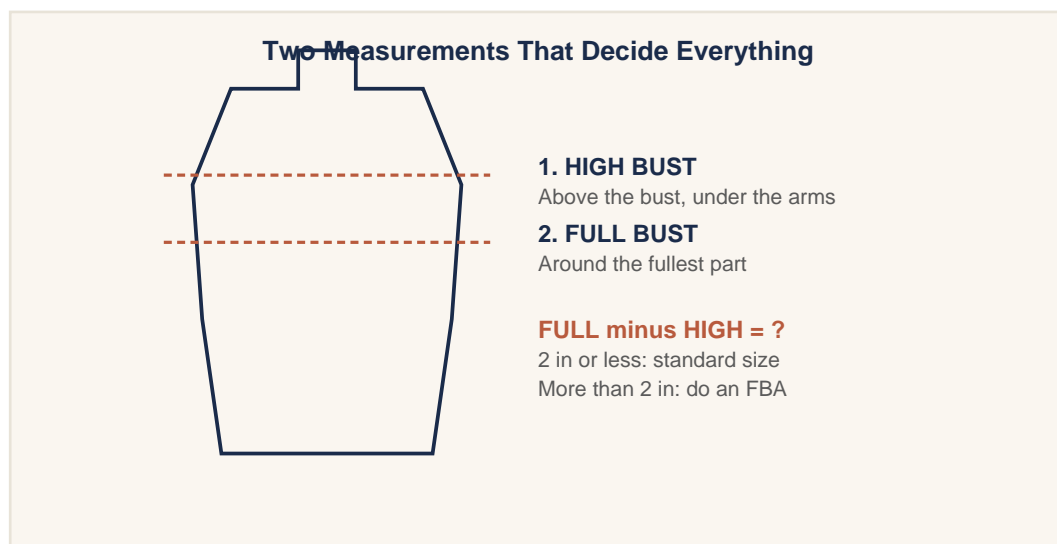
Before cutting any fashion fabric

Part One: Before You Cut

Take Three Measurements

You need two numbers to know whether you need an FBA, and a third to confirm the size. Have a friend help, or pin one end of the tape to your bra strap and read the number in a mirror.

- 1. High bust.** Wrap the tape around your upper chest, above the bust and under the arms. Keep the tape level all the way around. Write the number down.
- 2. Full bust.** Wrap the tape around the fullest part of your bust. Keep it level. Do not pull tight. Write it down.
- 3. Subtract.** Full bust minus high bust. The result tells you which cup the pattern is drafted for and how much width you need to add.



How Much to Add

Most commercial patterns are drafted for a B cup. The difference between your full bust and high bust tells you how much to add to the pattern.

Full bust minus high bust	Cup	Add this much per side
1 inch or less	A cup	Subtract 1/2 inch (SBA)
2 inches	B cup	No change needed
3 inches	C cup	Add 1/2 inch
4 inches	D cup	Add 1 inch
5 inches	DD or DDD	Add 1 1/2 inches

6 inches or more

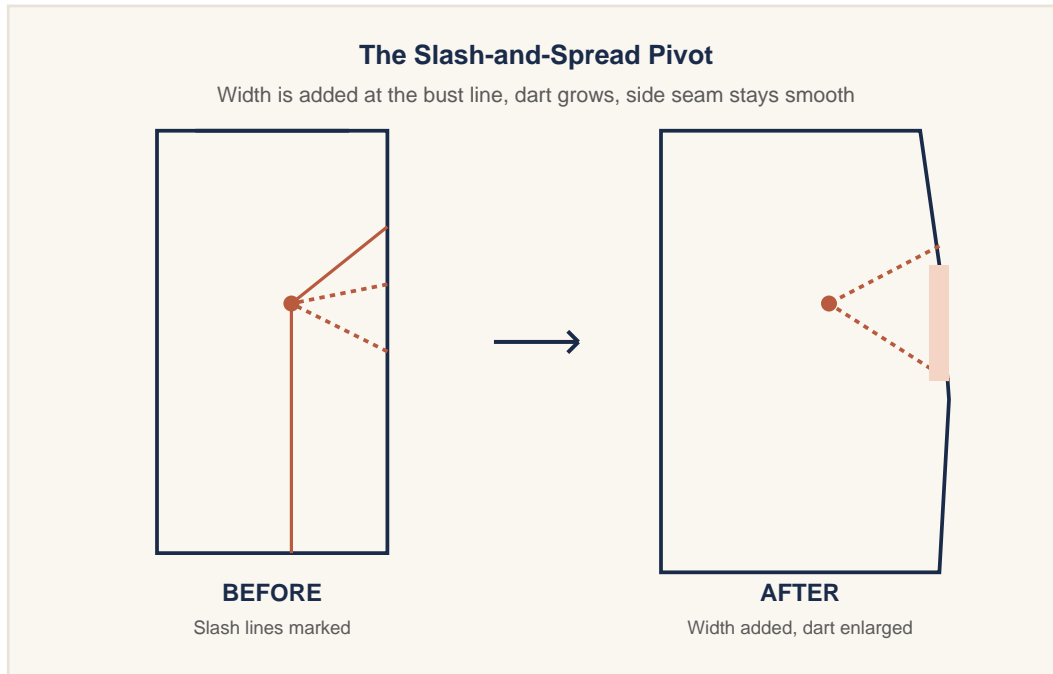
F or above

Add 2 inches

The number one rule. Pick the pattern size by your **high bust** measurement, not your full bust. The pattern's high bust matches the size chart. The bust adjustment adds the cup volume on top of that. Sizing by full bust gives you a chest that fits and shoulders that hang halfway down your arms.

Part Two: The Five-Step FBA

This is the slash-and-spread method. It works on any bodice pattern with a side bust dart. Trace your pattern onto fresh paper before you start. Never cut the original tissue. You will need to redo this for the next size or the next pattern.



Step 1: Mark the Bust Apex

On your traced front bodice piece, find the bust apex. This is the point the dart points toward. It is usually marked on the pattern with a small circle or a cross. If your pattern does not mark it, the apex is roughly where the dart legs would meet if you extended them.

Mark the apex with a clear dot. Label it **A**.

Beginner check. The apex on the pattern should sit roughly where your own bust apex sits on your body. If it does not, you may also need to lower or raise the apex point. Save that fix for after the FBA.

Step 2: Draw the Three Slash Lines

You will draw three lines on the pattern. These are the lines you will cut along in the next step.

Line 1. From the apex (point A), draw a straight line down to the hem of the bodice, parallel to the center front. Label this line **A to B**.

Line 2. From the apex, draw a line to the middle of the side dart (roughly halfway between the two dart legs at the side seam). Label this line **A to C**.

Line 3. From the apex, draw a line up toward the middle of the armhole. Stop the line about 1/8 inch before you reach the armhole edge. Do not cut all the way through. Label this line **A to D**.

Step 3: Cut and Pivot

Pick up your paper scissors. You will cut along the lines you just drew, but you will leave tiny hinges of paper at two of the corners. The hinges let the pattern pivot open without falling apart.

Cut 1. Cut along line A to B (apex to hem). Cut all the way through.

Cut 2. Cut along line A to C (apex to middle of side dart). Cut all the way through.

Cut 3. Cut along line A to D (apex to armhole). Stop just before the armhole edge. Leave a paper hinge of about 1/8 inch at the armhole. This hinge is what allows the pivot.

Now your pattern has three sections that can move independently while still hanging together at the armhole hinge. Lay it flat on a clean piece of pattern paper and tape the upper section (above lines A to C and A to D) down so it stays still.

Step 4: Spread the Right Amount

Now you spread the pattern to add width. The amount you spread depends on your cup size from the table on page 2.

Pivot the lower side section away from the rest of the pattern. The pattern will spread open along line A to B and line A to C at the same time. The hinge at the armhole keeps the upper part anchored.

Spread until the gap along line A to B (the vertical slash) measures the amount your cup size requires. For a C cup, that is 1/2 inch. For a D cup, 1 inch. For DD, 1 1/2 inches.

What happens to the dart. The side dart will get larger automatically. This is correct. A larger cup needs a larger dart to shape the fabric over the bust. Do not try to keep the dart the same size. The dart growing is the whole point.

Tape the spread sections down to the paper underneath so nothing shifts.

Common mistake. *Beginners try to keep the dart the same width as the original. They tape the dart edges back together and only spread the bottom. This adds length but no shaping. The bodice will hang straight down from the bust instead of curving in at the waist. Let the dart grow.*

Step 5: True the Hem and Side Seam

When you spread the pattern, the hem at the lower section dropped down below the rest of the hem. You need to even this out before cutting fabric.

The hem fix. The lower section is now longer than the rest of the front. Trim the lower edge so the hem makes one continuous line from the center front to the side seam. Use your ruler to draw a smooth line and then cut along it.

The side seam fix. The side seam now has a step in it where the dart got bigger. Redraw the side seam as a smooth line from the underarm to the hem, blending through the dart point. The dart legs may need to be redrawn to match each other in length.

Walk the seams. Place the back bodice piece next to the adjusted front and check that the side seams are still the same length. They should be. If the front is now longer than the back, you blended the wrong line. Redo the side seam blend.

You are done. Tape any loose paper edges, label the pattern piece with your size and the FBA amount (write "FBA + 1 inch" or whatever you added), and store it in a labeled envelope. You can reuse this adjusted piece on any pattern by the same designer in the same size.

Part Three: Troubleshooting

Even with the FBA done correctly, the muslin may still need small tweaks. Here are the five most common issues and how to read them.

Symptom: Drag lines from the bust apex toward the underarm

Fix: The dart is pointing in the wrong direction or the apex is too high. Lower the apex by 1/2 inch and redraw the dart legs to point at the new apex.

Symptom: The hem rides up at the front but hangs level at the back

Fix: Not enough was added in the FBA. Increase the spread by another 1/4 to 1/2 inch and retry.

Symptom: Gaping at the neckline or armhole

Fix: Too much was added. The hinge at the armhole was cut through completely instead of left as a hinge. Redo the FBA with a smaller spread, and make sure the armhole hinge stays intact.

Symptom: Side seam pulls or puckers at the dart

Fix: The dart is too pointy or the dart point goes all the way to the apex. End the dart 1 inch before the apex. Redraw the dart legs to taper smoothly.

Symptom: Bodice fits at the bust but the waist is now too loose

Fix: This is normal after an FBA. You added width at the bust, which carried down to the waist. Take the side seam in below the dart by the amount you added at the bust.

Use This Pattern Forever

The adjusted front bodice piece is now yours. As long as you stay the same size and cup, you can trace this adjusted piece onto any new pattern from the same designer that uses similar bodice drafting. Save it in a labeled envelope. The 20 minutes you spent today is the last 20 minutes you will ever spend on this adjustment for this pattern range.

Different pattern designers grade differently, so a new designer means a new FBA. The five steps stay the same. Only the starting size changes.

Next steps. Once you have done one FBA, the next one takes 10 minutes. The one after that takes 5. This is the single most useful pattern adjustment you will ever learn. Pair this guide with the Shoreline Shift Dress Pattern article on Sewing.com for a full first-dress walkthrough.

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